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STATE FOR AF/W AND EB

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: PM SORO DISCUSSES ELECTION DELAY, HIPC WITH CARTER  
CENTER

REF: A. ABIDJAN 38

[1](#)B. ABIDJAN 35

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Carter Center representative in Cote d'Ivoire, Sabina Vigani, told Emboffs that former President Jimmy Carter has offered to visit Cote d'Ivoire if it would advance the peace process. According to Vigani, President Gbagbo's governing FPI party remarked that such a visit is unnecessary, but opposition political parties and the Special Representative of OPA Facilitator Compaore have welcomed the offer. Vigani said that Prime Minister Soro told the Carter Center that former President Carter could help by lobbying the USG to support an early HIPC decision point for Cote d'Ivoire and has instructed the Foreign Minister to send a letter to Carter to make this point. End Summary.

#### CARTER CENTER OBSERVES IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The USG provided USD 200,000 ESF funds in September 2008 to the Carter Center to carry out an election observation project. The Carter Center also received funding from the UK and deployed a team to Cote d'Ivoire November 7-December 15 to observe the identification/voter registration process. In December 2008, following several site visits, the Carter Center issued a preliminary report on the team's findings. The report states that, while the team observed some irregularities, these did not impact on the integrity and credibility of the identification/voter registration process. Their findings did not support FPI allegations of widespread fraud.

[1](#)3. (SBU) When the USG and the UK government made their grants to the Carter Center, Cote d'Ivoire was scheduled to hold the first round of the presidential election on November 30. The election was postponed in early November and a new date has not yet been set. Vigani informed Emboffs on January 23 that Hrair Balian, the Associate Director of the Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program, visited Cote d'Ivoire for 2 days the week of January 19 to determine the cause of the electoral delay. Balian met with the Prime Minister, Ambassador Badini, Special Representative of the OPA Facilitator, and political party representatives. The Carter Center is preparing a budget to present to the US and UK governments for additional funding since its project's timetable has been thrown off by the election delay. It is also exploring the possibility of a joint observation mission with the South African NGO ESEA (Electoral Institute of South Africa) and possibly NDI in order to reduce costs.

#### CARTER CENTER CURIOUS ABOUT ELECTION DELAY

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[1](#)4. (C) Vigani told Emboffs that former President Carter has offered to travel to Cote d'Ivoire if his visit would advance the peace process. According to Vigani, Balian discussed the possibility of such a trip during his meetings in Cote d'Ivoire. Vigani stated that the FPI told Balian that there is no need for former President Carter to visit Cote d'Ivoire since the peace process is proceeding well.

However, she said other political parties and Ambassador Badini welcomed such a visit if it could appease political tensions. According to Vigani, some interlocutors indicated that President Carter might be able to influence Gbagbo to hold elections.

15. (C) According to Vigani, Soro told her and Balian that the international community must understand that Cote d'Ivoire needs time to organize successful elections. She also said that Prime Minister Soro wants to set up a "citizen dialogue" among the country's main political parties about 2 months before the election in order to obtain their commitment to accept the poll results and to foster dialogue regarding post-election governance. Vigani reflected that the Carter Center might engage in a nation building program in Cote d'Ivoire after elections are held.

16. (C) Vigani commented that Soro also said that former President Carter could be of assistance by lobbying the U.S. representatives at the international financial institutions to support an early decision point for Cote d'Ivoire. Vigani remarked that Soro said the USG is the obstacle to this, and in response, Balian told Soro that the way to transmit such a message would be to deliver it personally to President Carter during his visit to Cote d'Ivoire. According to Vigani, the Prime Minister then turned to Foreign Minister Bakayoko, who was in the meeting, and instructed him to send a letter to President Carter laying out the HIPC issue.

17. (C) Comment: PM Soro's eagerness to engage former President Carter on the HIPC issue reflects how worried authorities are about U.S. criticism of their performance in recent months. They are seizing every opportunity to lobby for U.S. support (see reftels). Whether the PM will follow through and actually solicit Carter's support remains to be seen.

18. (C) Comment Cont'd: The Carter Center is the only international organization that sent observers to watch and evaluate Cote d'Ivoire's identification process. Their report and their observations will be taken very seriously. Whenever elections are held, the Carter Center will also be in a unique position in that it may be the only organization capable of linking flaws in the identification process to flaws in the electoral process. Embassy would be very supportive of additional funding for the Carter Center, particularly for continued observation activities, but also for post-electoral, reconciliation activities. End Comment.

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